

prioritization

the action or process of deciding the relative importance or urgency of a thing or things

How to prioritize work when everything is important? "Busyness" doesn't always equate with progress—these prioritization techniques will help you make the most of your workday.

During the workday, tasks are often prioritized (or not) according to the needs of others or the immediacy of deadlines. Prioritizing tasks effectively—with intention and according to future goals—can change this, ensuring that every task you tackle drives value and keeping unimportant tasks from cluttering your to-do list.

By implementing prioritization strategies, you can drastically change the arc of your workday to really make the most of your time in the office. Whether you're a sole proprietor or an executive at a Fortune 500 company, these strategies will help you evaluate and set your top priorities:

Have a daily list that contains all tasks in one Effective prioritization comes from understanding the full scope of what you need to get done—even the most mundane tasks should be written down and considered.

Everything from making calls to scheduling a one-on-one meeting with your boss should be captured in the same place. Once everything is written down, prioritization typically happens according to the importance, urgency, length, and reward of each task.

Highlight what's urgent Your to-do list should provide full visibility of deadlines, helping you to identify which tasks must be completed promptly and to plan ahead according to future deadlines.

Creating deadlines even when they're not formally required is also important; otherwise, you will continue pushing back important tasks simply because they aren't time-sensitive. (This strategy is helpful in increasing productivity and reducing procrastination.)

Prioritize based on importance and urgency In his 1989 book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey suggests tasks should be categorized (and then prioritized) according to importance and urgency:

- ~Urgent and important: These tasks should be done first
- ~Important but not urgent: Block off time on your calendar to get this done, without interruption
- ~Urgent but unimportant: Delegate. Delegate. Delegate.
- ~Neither urgent or important: Remove from your to-do list

Avoid competing priorities (One Task at a Time) When the tasks you're working on aren't particularly difficult, it's relatively easy to manage them in tandem. However, as difficulty increases, research shows *people who are in positions of power are more likely to prioritize a single goal, whereas people in low-powered positions will continue to try and manage multiple priorities. This dual-task strategy has been linked to a decline in performance*, which means the most important tasks aren't fulfilled to the highest standard.

A tactic for staying focused on one important task at a time is identifying likely distractions—concurrent tasks or ad-hoc requests—and actively avoiding them throughout the day. This means if you're tasked with pulling data for a project at the same time you're creating slides for a presentation, you should prioritize one task and avoid any work, emails, messages, or preparation related to the other.

QUICK TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PRIORITIZATION

As you realize the necessity of proper prioritization, it can suddenly feel more complicated—and more stress-inducing—than creating a simple task list. The key strategies are summarized below:

Write everything down: Tasks should be captured in one place.

Create clear deadlines: Give yourself full visibility of deadlines & create deadlines for yourself when none are formally required.

Urgent-versus-important method: Prioritize urgent and important tasks; set a specific time to work on important nonurgent tasks; and delegate or remove all other tasks.

Avoid distractions: Intentionally steer clear of competing tasks, especially as task difficulty increases.



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